

Examining Predictors of Anti-Immigrant Sentiment

by

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ABSTRACT

Using integrated threat theory as the theoretical framework, this study examines the impact of perceived realistic threats (threats to welfare) and symbolic threats (threats to worldview) on anti-immigrant sentiment among a nationally representative sample in the U.S. Analysis of the antecedents of prejudice is particularly relevant today as anti-immigrant sentiment and hostile policies toward the population have risen in the past two decades. Perceived discrimination has also become salient within immigrant communities, negatively impacting both mental and physical health. Using logistic ordinal regressions with realistic threat, symbolic threat, and immigrant sentiment scales, this study found that both realistic and symbolic threats increased participants' likelihood of selecting a higher level of anti-immigrant sentiment, suggesting both are predictive of prejudice. However, symbolic threats emerged as a greater predictor of anti-immigrant sentiment, with an effect size over twice that of realistic threats. Implications for social work policy, practice, and future research are made.

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INTRODUCTION

Using integrated threat theory (ITT) as the theoretical framework, this study explores factors that impact the formation of anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States, particularly the roles of realistic and symbolic threats. ITT explicates prejudice as the product of threats perceived by the in-group to emanate from the immigrant out-group (Stephan, Ybarra, Martinez, Schwarzwald, & Tur-Kaspa, 1998). The theory asserts that prejudice-inducing threats can be classified into four domains: realistic threats, symbolic threats, negative stereotypes, and intergroup anxiety. ITT defines realistic threats as those that are perceived to jeopardize in-group welfare by diminishing the group's political, economic, or social power. Resource scarcity and lack of employment opportunities are often precipitating factors of realistic threats. Symbolic threats are those that are perceived by the in-group to challenge their worldview by compromising held norms, values, beliefs, and morals. Negative stereotypes promote an atmosphere of threat among the in-group that heightens the perception of risk associated with out-group interaction. Lastly, intergroup anxiety represents a personal threat for members of the in-group who perceive a risk of rejection or embarrassment upon interaction with the out-group due to inter-group differences (Stephan et al., 1998). The role of realistic and symbolic threats in the formation of negative attitudes toward immigrants is the focus of the present study. Increased knowledge of the predictors of anti-immigrant sentiment is particularly significant, as negative sentiment and anti-immigration policies have risen throughout the U.S. in recent decades (Androff et al., 2011; Becerra, 2012; Kang, 2012; Esses, Dovidio, & Hodson, 2002). Increased hostility has contributed toward experiences of discrimination and oppression for many immigrants (Araujo & Borrell, 2006; Pulido

2007). To address the current climate of anti-immigrant sentiment and the proliferation of discrimination, greater knowledge of the predictors of prejudice that informs social work practice, policy advocacy, and future research is needed.

BACKGROUND

Migration across international borders is occurring at a higher rate than ever before documented (Esses, Deaux, Lalonde, & Brown, 2010). It is estimated that three percent of the world's population lives in a country other than that in which they were born (Esses et al., 2010). Consistent with its historical roots as a nation of immigrants, the U.S. is the leading recipient of the global share of immigrants, hosting 43 million foreign-born individuals, or approximately four times more than any other country (United Nations, 2011). Accordingly, roughly one in eight U.S. residents is foreign-born and one in 20 residents is a Latino immigrant, representing the largest immigrant population in the country (Fennelly & Federico, 2008; Motel & Patten, 2013).

Anti-Immigrant Sentiment

Despite the high rate of immigration to the U.S. and the country's historical identity as a nation of immigrants, public sentiment toward most immigrant groups has been negative throughout U.S. history, evidenced both by public opinion polls and legislation (Byrne & Dixon, 2013; Esses et al., 2010; Kang, 2012). Byrne and Dixon (2013) succinctly describe the irony of mainstream America's sentiment toward immigrants, stating, "[w]hile the United States has a history and narrative as a nation of immigrants...public opinion is decidedly lukewarm at best when it comes to immigration" (pp. 85-86). Public opinion polling has revealed that since 1945, a majority or near majority of Americans has been against increased immigration to the country

(Reimers, 1998). In 1993, three-fifths of Americans polled viewed immigration as negative for the country (Morganthau, 1993). In a more recent survey conducted in 2005, 44% of respondents felt immigrants placed too high of a burden on taxpayers, and 49% agreed that immigrants were detrimental to the U.S. economy (Segovia & DeFever, 2010). Additionally, there has been significant and growing concern over undocumented immigration to the U.S., which has been exacerbated by an inflated perception of the number of unauthorized immigrants in the country (Espenshade & Hempstead, 1996; Esses et al., 2010; Lapinski, Peltola, Shaw, & Yang, 1997). A public opinion poll conducted just after the turn of the century demonstrated that 28% of respondents were concerned about unauthorized immigration; by 2007, that number had increased to 45% of respondents (Segovia & DeFever, 2010).

Consequences of Anti-Immigrant Sentiment

Over the course of the past two decades, and particularly the latter decade, mainstream American politics have reflected an increase in anti-immigrant sentiment (Becerra, 2012; Byrne & Dixon, 2013). Immigration has become a contentious political issue, garnering much attention from both the public and policymakers (Becerra, Androff, Ayón, & Castillo, 2012; Kang, 2012). Accordingly, immigrants have increasingly become the target of hostile and exclusionary legislation (Androff & Tavassoli, 2012; Androff et al., 2011; Becerra, 2012; Kang, 2012; Murray & Marx, 2013). At the state level, California's Proposition 187 and Arizona's Senate Bill 1070 epitomize this class of legislation recently witnessed toward immigrants; both efforts had the objective of restricting immigrants' access to social and public services and mandated public employees to report those they suspected to be in the country without authorization to

authorities (Diaz, Saenz, & Kwan, 2011; Lee, Ottati, & Hussain, 2001; Michelson & Pallares, 2001).

Paralleling the swell in opposition toward immigrants, perceived discrimination has become a salient experience within the immigrant community, particularly for those that are non-white (Araujo & Borrell, 2006; Pulido, 2007). Discrimination negatively impacts immigrants' quality of life in a number of ways. A multitude of studies have demonstrated a link between discrimination and poor physical and mental health, particularly depression (Araujo & Borrell, 2006; Lassetter & Callister, 2009; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Williams & Mohammed, 2009). Additionally, for many undocumented immigrants, the fear of deportation induces anxiety (Androff et al., 2011; Joseph, 2011). An increase in the stress response, as well as a decrease in healthy behaviors and increase in unhealthy behaviors, are the mechanisms by which discrimination negatively impacts the health status of immigrants (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Williams & Mohammed, 2009). As with adults, discrimination is also a prevalent experience for immigrant children, impacting their psychological health; children who have experienced discrimination often exhibit reduced social skills, academic competence, and self-esteem (Coll & Magnusson, 1997; Oxman-Martinez et al., 2012).

Integrated Threat Theory

The negative impacts of discrimination, as well as the many social challenges caused by prejudice, have contributed to a growing body of research on the underlying causes of prejudice (Stephan, Renfro, Esses, Stephan, & Martin, 2005). Stephan and colleagues (1998) theorize that prejudice is the product of threats that are perceived by

the in-group to emanate from the out-group. This threat model of prejudice, known as integrated threat theory (ITT), has its roots in anthropology and sociology. Four categories of negative sentiment-inducing threats are described by the model. *Realistic threats* are those perceived by the in-group to compromise their group's welfare. Realistic threats are power-related and encompass threats that the in-group feels immigrants pose to their political, economic, or social status (Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman, 1999). Among others, these can include perceptions of threats related to crime, drugs, job scarcity, and economic costs. Perceived realistic threats often

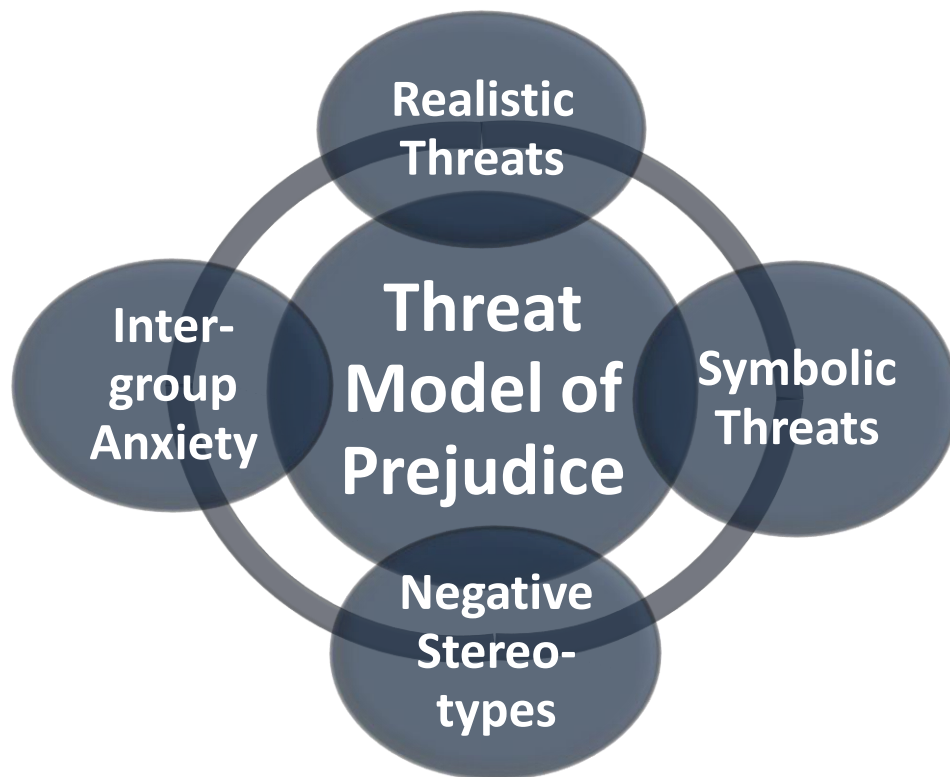


Figure 1: Integrated Threat Theory

proliferate during times of resource scarcity and unemployment. The second category of threats perceived by the in-group is *symbolic threats*, or those that are perceived to

challenge the in-group's worldview. Symbolic threats include perceived threats to in-group norms, values, beliefs, and morals and largely stem from culture-based differences. Other theories, such as symbolic racism, assert that perceived threats to worldview are an expression of prejudice; however, ITT posits that perceived threats to worldview *lead* to prejudice (Kinder & Sears, 1981). *Negative stereotypes* cast negative projections of the out-group, perpetuating the perception of threat among the in-group and stimulating fear around the prospect of interaction. The last domain, *intergroup anxiety*, represents a personal threat to members of the in-group who fear being rejected or embarrassed by the out-group upon interaction with them (Stephan et al., 1998).

Previous Studies

The four threat constructs explicated by ITT have been empirically tested as predictors of in-group prejudice toward various out-groups, including: immigrants, African Americans, males, HIV-positive individuals, and cancer patients; it has also been validated in multiple countries across various cultures (Berrenberg, Finlay, Stephan, & Stephan, 2003; Stephan et al., 1998, 1999, 2002, 2000). In a study by Stephan et al. (1999), the extent to which the four threat domains predicted negative sentiment toward three immigrant groups, including Cubans, Mexicans, and Asians, was assessed. Questionnaires were administered to university students to measure levels of perceived threats and prejudicial sentiment. For Cubans and Mexicans, realistic threats, symbolic threats, negative stereotypes, and intergroup anxiety were all significant predictors of anti-immigrant sentiment. For Asians, symbolic threats and negative stereotypes were statistically significant predictors of anti-immigrant sentiment, but realistic threats and intergroup anxiety were only marginally significant (Stephan et al., 1999). Another study

by Stephan et al. (2005) tested only the impact of realistic and symbolic threats on immigrant attitude formation. In the study, university students were given hypothetical information on a group of foreigners preparing to immigrate to the U.S. The researchers presented participants with four scenarios: a control scenario offering only background information on the immigrant group, one that discussed details representing realistic threats, another that discussed details representing symbolic threats, and one that discussed details representing both realistic and symbolic threats. Findings suggested that scenarios representing only realistic or symbolic threats were not associated with greater anti-immigrant sentiment than the control scenario. However, when the scenario representing both realistic and symbolic threats was presented to participants, negative attitudes toward the immigrant group increased. These findings propose perceived realistic and symbolic threats, together, have a synergistic effect on anti-immigrant attitude formation (Stephan et al., 2005). A recent study conducted by Murray and Marx (2013) considered the roles of realistic threats, symbolic threats, and intergroup anxiety on the formation of negative sentiment toward authorized and unauthorized immigrants, among a sample of university students. Questionnaires were administered to assess the extent to which each of the three threats were perceived by participants, as well as the extent to which prejudicial attitudes were present. Realistic threats, symbolic threats, and intergroup anxiety were all found to be statistically significant predictors of prejudice toward both authorized and unauthorized immigrants. However, symbolic threats were less internally reliable in the study, compared to realistic threats and intergroup anxiety (Murray & Marx, 2013). While all studies have found ITT's threat domains to be

significant predictors of anti-immigrant sentiment, there is no identified trend of threat domains that are consistently stronger predictors.

Similar to the aforementioned studies, the present study seeks to determine the extent to which perceived realistic and symbolic threats predict anti-immigrant sentiment. However, this study is unique in that it is the first to consider the impact of realistic and symbolic threats on anti-immigrant sentiment among a randomly sampled, nationally representative sample. The former studies were conducted with relatively small, non-representative samples of university students. Furthermore, this study is the first to examine the predictive nature of the threat domains on anti-immigrant sentiment in a context of economic disarray, as data were collected just after the official end of the Great Recession (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2010). By determining the capacity of realistic and symbolic threats to predict anti-immigrant sentiment among a nationally representative sample, this study generates a deeper understanding of Americans' negative attitudes toward immigrants.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Data from the *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration, 2010* cross-sectional dataset were analyzed for this study (Wunderlich et al., 2010). The survey, commissioned annually by a collaborative of European and North American organizations, was conducted by TNS Opinion, an international public opinion polling organization. Conducted between August and November of 2010, nationally representative data were collected in a number of immigrant-receiving developed countries in North America and Europe, including: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the United

Kingdom, and the U.S. Using Random Digit Dialing, a multi-stage random sampling method was employed to collect data related to perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes around immigration in each country. Computer-assisted telephone interviewing was utilized to collect over 8,000 surveys, 1,005 of which were collected in the U.S. Approximately 80% of these surveys collected in the U.S. were conducted via landline telephone, with the remainder conducted with cell phone users (Wunderlich et al., 2010). The U.S. was selected for the examination of factors influencing anti-immigrant sentiment formation in the present study due to the high rate of immigration to the country, as well as the recent spike in anti-immigrant sentiment throughout the nation.

As illustrated in Table 1, 70% of U.S. respondents identified as white, with the remainder identifying as black/African American (12.2%), Hispanic (7.7%), Asian/Asian American (2.8%), or other (6.8%). A slight majority of respondents was female (53.1%), and the largest proportion (43.7%) was between 45 and 64 years of age. Just over half (51.9%) of respondent were employed either part or full time. The vast majority identified as religious, with nearly half (47.9%) of respondents selecting “somewhat religious” and 35.8% selecting “very religious.” Over 70% of respondents stated they had completed high school, attended some community college, or obtained a college degree. All but 10% of respondents were natives of the U.S. A majority of participants were either politically moderate (32.4%) or conservative (43%). Most lived in a town or small city (35.9%) or suburb (28.3%).

Table 1

Sample Demographics

Race/Ethnicity	White: 70% Black/African American: 12.2% Hispanic: 7.7% Asian/Asian American: 2.8% Other: 6.8%
Gender	Female: 53.1% Male: 46.9%
Age	18-24: 6.2% 25-34: 10.9% 35-44: 12.3% 45-54: 20.9% 55-64: 22.8% 65+: 6.9%
Employment Status	Yes: 51.9% No: 48.1%
Religiosity	Not at all: 16.3% Somewhat religious: 47.9% Very religious: 35.8%
Level of Education	Primary or less: 1.4% Some secondary: 6.6% Completed secondary/community college: 37.6% College degree: 35.1% Post-graduate degree: 19.3%
Nativity Status	Immigrant: 8.4% Native: 91.6%
Political Ideology	Liberal: 24.6% Moderate: 32.4% Conservative: 43%
Urban/Rural Residence	Big city: 20.1% Suburb: 28.3% Town/small city: 35.9% Country/village: 5.7% Farm/countryside: 9.9%

Measures

A plurality of items in the dataset represented perceived realistic and symbolic threats and immigrant sentiment. While each item alone represented only one aspect of threat or sentiment, together, the items provided a more comprehensive assessment of perceived threats and attitudes toward immigrants. As a result, two scales were created

for the predictor variables, realistic and symbolic threats, and a third scale was created for the outcome variable, immigrant sentiment. The items displaying sufficient reliability and validity to be included in each scale are detailed below, along with their recoded response options.

Realistic threat scale. According to ITT, realistic threats are perceived as compromising the in-group's economic, social, and political power, or overall welfare. Five items in the dataset elicited perceptions of these types of threats, forming the realistic threat scale. The range of the scale was four to 17, with a higher score representing a stronger perception of realistic threat.

1. Some people think that immigrants contribute more in taxes than they benefit from health and welfare services. Other people think that immigrants benefit more from health and welfare services than they contribute in taxes. Which comes closer to your point of view? (0= Immigrants contribute more in taxes than they benefit from health and welfare services, 1= Immigrants benefit more from health and welfare services than they contribute in taxes)
2. Could you please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each of these statements about immigrants in general? ---Immigrants take jobs away from native born. (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Somewhat disagree, 3= Somewhat agree, 4= Strongly agree)
3. Could you please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each of these statements about immigrants in general? ---Immigrants bring down

the wages of U.S. citizens. (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Somewhat disagree, 3= Somewhat agree, 4= Strongly agree)

4. Now I am going to read you a few statements about illegal immigrants.

Can you please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements? ---Illegal immigrants increase crime in our society.

(1= Strongly disagree, 2= Somewhat disagree, 3= Somewhat agree, 4= Strongly agree)

5. Now I am going to read you a few statements about illegal immigrants.

Can you please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements? ---Illegal immigrants are a burden on social

services. (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Somewhat disagree, 3= Somewhat agree, 4= Strongly agree)

Symbolic threat scale. According to ITT, symbolic threats are those that are perceived to jeopardize the values, beliefs, norms, and worldview of the in-group. Two items in the dataset provided insight into participants' perceptions of immigrant acculturation and pointed toward the presence of symbolic threat perception for those who felt immigrants were poorly integrating and adopting American culture (van Osch & Breugelmans, 2011). The scale range was two to eight, with a higher score representing more symbolic threat perception.

1. Generally speaking, how well do you think that immigrants are integrating into American society? (1= Very well, 2= Well, 3= Poorly, 4= Very poorly)

2. And what about the children of immigrants who were born in the U.S.?

How well do you think they are integrated into American society? (1=

Very well, 2= Well, 3= Poorly, 4= Very poorly)

Immigrant sentiment scale. Nine items in the dataset elicited participants' attitudes toward immigrants. The scale range was four to 16, with a higher score reflecting anti-immigrant sentiment.

1. Some people say that immigration is more of a problem for the U.S.

Others see it as more of an opportunity for the U.S. Which comes closer to your point of view? (0= Immigration is more of an opportunity for the U.S., 1= Immigration is more of a problem for the U.S.)

2. According to official estimates, around XX percent of the population was born in another country. In your opinion, is this too many, a lot but not too many or not many? (1= Not many, 2= A lot but not too many, 3= Too many)

3. Should access to state or public schools be available to nationals only, to nationals and all legal immigrants, or to nationals and all immigrants? (1= Available to U.S. citizens and all immigrants both legal and illegal, 2= Available to U.S. citizens and all legal immigrants, 3= Available to U.S. citizens only)

4. Should access to emergency health care be available to nationals only, to nationals and all legal immigrants, or to nationals and all immigrants? (1= Available to U.S. citizens and all immigrants both legal and illegal, 2=

Available to U.S. citizens and all legal immigrants, 3= Available to U.S. citizens only)

5. Some people think that immigration enriches American culture with new customs and ideas. Others think that these new customs and ideas negatively affect American culture. Which comes closer to your point of view? (0= Immigration enriches American culture, 1= Immigration negatively affects American culture)
6. Can you tell me if you are worried or not worried about illegal immigration? (0= Not worried, 1= Worried)
7. Some people think that legal immigrants who come to the U.S. to work should only be admitted temporarily and then be required to return vs. allowed to stay permanently. Which comes closer to your point of view? (0= They should be given the opportunity to obtain legal status that allows them to stay in the U.S., 1= They should be required to return to their country of origin)
8. Thinking now about immigrants who are currently living in the U.S. illegally, should they be required to return to their country of origin vs. be given the opportunity to obtain legal status that allows them to stay here? (0= They should be given the opportunity to obtain legal status that allows them to stay in the U.S., 1= They should be required to return to their country of origin)

9. In your opinion, do you think that most of the immigrants in the U.S. are here legally, or are most of them here illegally. (0= Most immigrants are in the U.S. legally, 1= Most immigrants are in the U.S. illegally)

Control variables. Nine relevant control variables were included in this study, including: (1) age, (2) gender, (3) race/ethnicity, (4) level of education, (5) political ideology, (6) employment status, (7) religiosity, (8) urban/rural residence, and (9) nativity. Age, gender, and race/ethnicity were included, as they are common control variables and relevant to the current study (Berg, 2009; Hussey & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2011). Prior research suggests that a decrease in anti-immigrant sentiment accompanies an increase in education, providing the rationale for inclusion of level of education as control variable (Citrin, Green, Muste, & Wong, 1997; Espenshade & Calhoun, 1993; McDaniel, Nooruddin, & Shortle, 2011). Political ideology was controlled for due to the positive correlation between conservatism and anti-immigrant sentiment (Haubert & Fussell, 2006). Additionally, employment status was important to control for, as economic competition can increase realistic threat perception (Stephan et al., 2000). Religiosity was included as a control as research suggests there is a relationship between immigrant sentiment and religiosity, though the relationship is nuanced and findings remain inconclusive (McDaniel et al., 2011). Research also suggests there is a relationship between rural residence and anti-immigrant attitudes, providing the rationale for inclusion of urban/rural residence as a control (Fennelly & Federico, 2008). Lastly, nativity status was included as a control because of its inherent importance to a study related to immigration.

Analysis

To exclusively analyze data collected in the U.S., it was first isolated from the rest of the *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration, 2010* dataset. Frequencies were run to confirm each item was asked in the U.S. and to ensure each had a normal distribution of responses. Some items had poor response distribution due to documentation of “spontaneous” responses that were volunteered by respondents and not included in the standard interview protocol. Because these responses were infrequent, response options were recoded to exclude “spontaneous” responses from analysis and collapsed into dichotomous variables. All ordinal variable items were also recoded so that higher numbers reflected greater threat perception or anti-immigrant sentiment.

Several exploratory analyses were conducted before ultimately creating the three distinct scales and running logistic ordinal regressions. First, exploratory factor and reliability analyses were run with the totality of the items in each measure to examine the fit and internal reliability of all items as one large scale. The items loaded into three separate components and had poor reliability, indicating they were three separate scales. Additionally, correlations with all items in each measure were run. Nearly every combination of variables was significantly correlated, indicating sufficient correlation to proceed with ordinal logistic regressions using realistic threat, symbolic threat, and immigrant sentiment scales.

To create the scales, exploratory factor analyses were first run for each projected scale to determine the strength and fit of each item in the scale, followed by a reliability analysis to confirm the internal consistency of those items as one scale. The Keiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) score for the realistic threat items was .737; the symbolic threat

items emerged with a KMO of .500. For the immigrant sentiment items, the KMO was stronger at .836. The Cronbach's alpha for the realistic threat items originally emerged with a score of .729. By omitting an item asking participants about their perception of the number of immigrants in the country "legally" versus "illegally," the Cronbach's alpha increased to .740. The symbolic threat items received a Cronbach's alpha of .635 and the immigrant sentiment items emerged with a score of .778. With the exception of a realistic threat item discarded, the items were determined to have sufficient content validity and internal consistency to proceed. The test of multicollinearity verified that scale items were measuring distinct variables. As a result, the scales were created, and participant responses for all items in each scale were summed. For the realistic threat scale, the final scale range was four to 17 (SD= 3.50); for the symbolic threat scale, the range was two to eight (SD= 1.46); and for the immigrant sentiment scale, the range was four to 16 (SD= 3.12).

After the scales were created, frequencies were run on the control variables to ensure an adequate distribution of responses. Responses options were then recoded and collapsed. Because residence and race/ethnicity were not ordinal variables, dummy codes (0= no, 1= yes) were used. Employment status was recoded into a dichotomous variable, collapsing retired, student, not employed, and disability into not working (0= no) and full and part time employment into employed (1= yes). Finally, to assess the significance of realistic and symbolic threats as predictors of anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S., three sets of ordinal logistic regression models were run. Ordinal logistic regressions were selected for this study as all the items in the scales had ranked response options with unequal or unknown distances between responses. The models revealed

participants' likelihood of choosing one immigrant sentiment category over another when perceiving symbolic and/or realistic threats. Model 1 assessed the impact of realistic threats on anti-immigrant sentiment; Model 2 assessed the impact of symbolic threats on anti-immigrant sentiment; and Model 3 assessed the effect of both threat categories on anti-immigrant sentiment. All models controlled for age, gender, race/ethnicity, level of education, political ideology, employment status, religiosity, urban/rural residence, and nativity.

RESULTS

The results of this study are represented as adjusted odds ratios (OR_{adj}) with 95% confidence intervals (CIs). Table 2 illustrates the findings from each ordinal logistic regression model, all three of which met the parallel lines assumption of ordinal logistic regressions (Allison, 1999). The results indicated that both realistic and symbolic threats were significant predictors of anti-immigrant sentiment, but that symbolic threats had a larger effect size.

Model 1 [$\chi^2(16, n = 1,005) = 222.192, p < .001$] demonstrated the impact of realistic threat perception on anti-immigrant sentiment, finding that those who perceived more realistic threat ($OR_{adj} = 1.21, p < .001$) had a significantly higher likelihood of selecting a more anti-immigrant response. In other words, for every one unit increase indicating greater realistic threat perception, there was a 21% increase in the odds of choosing a higher category of immigrant sentiment, representing more unfavorable attitudes. The results also indicated that black/African American ($OR_{adj} = .49, p < .001$) and Hispanic participants ($OR_{adj} = .59, p < .05$) were significantly more likely than whites

Table 2

Ordinal Logistic Regressions: Perceived Realistic and Symbolic Threats and Anti-Immigrant Sentiment

	Model 1: Realistic Threats		Model 2: Symbolic Threats		Model 3: Realistic/Symbolic Threats	
	B	OR	B	OR	B	OR
Black/African American	-.711 (.201)	.49***	-.264 (.345)	.77	-.618 (.349)	.54(a)
Hispanic	-.523 (.259)	.59*	-.696 (.484)	.50	-.863 (.487)	.42(a)
Asian/Asian American	.442 (.390)	1.56	-.462 (.759)	.63	-.376 (.766)	.69
Other Race	-.318 (.248)	.73	.301 (.504)	.74	.389 (.520)	1.48
Gender	-.035 (.125)	.97	-.041 (.221)	.96	.025 (.223)	1.03
Age	.055 (.047)	1.06	.077 (.083)	1.08	.076 (.083)	1.08
Political Ideology	.298 (.043)	1.35***	.250 (.076)	1.28**	.295 (.077)	1.34***
Level of Education	-.328 (.073)	.72***	-.516 (.129)	.60***	-.533 (.130)	.59***
Suburb	.520 (.184)	1.68**	.273 (.321)	1.31	.493 (.324)	1.64
Town/Small City	.386 (.179)	1.47*	.332 (.312)	1.39	.509 (.316)	1.66
Country/Village	.918 (.303)	2.50***	-.382 (.532)	.68	.100 (.540)	1.11
Farm/Countryside	.918 (.243)	2.50	.411 (.385)	1.51	.590 (.388)	1.81
Nativity	-.332 (.242)	.72	-.353 (.461)	.70	-.449 (.473)	.64
Religiosity	.021 (.092)	1.02	-.016 (.174)	.98	-.045 (.175)	.96
Employment Status	.079 (.138)	1.08	.163 (.239)	1.18	.275 (.241)	1.32
Realistic Threats	.188 (.019)	1.21***			.217 (.035)	1.24***
Symbolic Threats			.469 (.077)	1.60***	.425 (.078)	1.53***
Cox and Snell	.234		.243		.352	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

to choose a lower response category, even when perceiving realistic threat. Blacks/African Americans and Hispanics were 51% and 41% less likely than whites,

respectively, to indicate higher anti-immigrant sentiment even when they perceived realistic threat. Additionally, those with a higher level of education ($OR_{adj} = .72, p < .001$) were 28% less likely to choose a higher response category, even when perceiving realistic threat. Oppositely, participants living in the farm/countryside ($OR_{adj} = 2.50, p < .001$), suburbs ($OR_{adj} = 1.68, p < .01$), or town/small city ($OR_{adj} = 1.47, p < .05$) were significantly more likely than those living in a big city to choose a higher response category when perceiving realistic threat, indicating higher anti-immigrant sentiment. Participants residing in a farm/countryside were 150% more likely than those living in a big city to indicate higher anti-immigrant sentiment when they perceived realistic threat; those residing in a suburb were 68% more likely and those living in a town/small city were 47% more likely than those living in a big city to indicate higher anti-immigrant sentiment when perceiving realistic threat. Similarly, those with more conservative political ideology ($OR_{adj} = 1.35, p < .001$) were 35% more likely to choose a higher response category when perceiving realistic threat, indicating higher anti-immigrant sentiment.

Model 2 [$\chi^2(16, n = 1,005) = 77.294, p < .001$] represented the impact of symbolic threat perception on anti-immigrant sentiment, demonstrating that those with greater perceived symbolic threat ($OR_{adj} = 1.60, p < .001$) had a significantly higher likelihood of selecting a higher anti-immigrant response category. In other words, for every one unit increase indicating greater symbolic threat perception, there was a 60% increase in the odds of choosing a higher category of immigrant sentiment, indicating greater anti-immigrant attitudes. The results also indicated that those with more conservative political ideology ($OR_{adj} = 1.28, p < .001$) were 28% more likely to choose a

higher response category when perceiving symbolic threat, indicating higher anti-immigrant sentiment. Conversely, those with a higher level of education ($OR_{adj} = .60$, $p < .001$) were 40% less likely to choose a higher response category even when perceiving symbolic threat.

Model 3 [$\chi^2(17, n = 1,005) = 119.734, p < .001$] represented the impact of perceived realistic and symbolic threat, in combination, on anti-immigrant sentiment, demonstrating that those perceiving more realistic ($OR_{adj} = 1.24, p < .001$) and symbolic ($OR_{adj} = 1.53, p < .001$) threat had a higher likelihood of selecting more anti-immigrant responses. In other words, for every one unit increase indicating greater perception of realistic and symbolic threat, there was a respective 24% and 53% increase in the odds of choosing a higher category of immigrant sentiment, representing more negative sentiment. Participants with more conservative political ideology ($OR_{adj} = 1.34, p < .001$) were 34% more likely to choose a higher response category when perceiving realistic and symbolic threat, indicating greater anti-immigrant sentiment. Conversely, those with a higher level of education ($OR_{adj} = .59, p < .001$) were 41% less likely to choose a higher response category even when perceiving realistic and symbolic threat. Approaching statistical significance, the results also indicated that, compared to whites, there was a 46% and 58% increase, respectively, in the likelihood of blacks/African Americans and Hispanics choosing a lower immigrant sentiment response category even when perceiving both realistic and symbolic threat, indicating slightly less anti-immigrant sentiment.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the impact that perceived realistic and symbolic threats had on participants' attitudes toward immigrants. Findings indicated that both perceived realistic and symbolic threats were significant predictors of anti-immigrant sentiment. This is consistent with the previous studies, which largely found both threat domains to predict anti-immigrant sentiment. This finding is also consistent with observational data in the U.S., as both types of threats can be detected in public discourse, political efforts, and stereotypes related to immigration in the U.S. Concerns related to the compromised physical, economic, and political wellbeing of natives are often discussed and reinforced by stereotypes, reflecting widespread realistic threat perception. Immigration is frequently conceptualized and discussed as a criminal justice and public safety issue, evidenced by arguments for increased funding for constructing a fence spanning the U.S.-Mexico border, improving border security, and heightening immigration enforcement and detention (Welch, 2007; Massey & Pren, 2012; Michelson & Pallares, 2001). Additionally, immigrants are frequently stereotyped as criminals, drug traffickers, and terrorists (Johnson, 2004). Perceived threats to economic wellbeing manifest themselves in efforts to restrict immigrant access to social services, such as welfare benefits and education. Such efforts have been witnessed at both the state and federal level under the pretense of reducing the economic drain of immigrants (Diaz et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2001; Michelson & Pallares, 2001). This threat perception is also reflected in and perpetuated by stereotypes of immigrants as frequent welfare users and taking jobs from natives (Johnson, 2004). Perceived threats to political power recently have been expressed, as concerns over the growing number of Latinos and increasing political

influence of the population has come to the fore (Barreto & Nuño, 2011). As with realistic threats, political efforts reflecting symbolic threats can be cited, such as policies of incorporation aimed at expediting the immigrant integration process. Examples of efforts to curb the threat of cultural evolution are found in English only and English immersion laws, such as California's Proposition 227 and Arizona's Proposition 203, which abolished most bilingual education programs (Knoll, 2012; Mora, 2000; Stritikus & Garcia, 2005).

While both realistic and symbolic threats were found to be predictive of anti-immigrant sentiment, this study found symbolic threats to be an even stronger predictor of unfavorable attitudes toward immigrants. This finding suggests that Americans may be more concerned with the preservation of their worldview than with their physical, economic, and political wellbeing and power. This is a particularly notable finding and one that defies conventional wisdom, given that data were collected during an economic slump, just one year after the official end of the economic recession (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2010). It suggests that, even when faced with economic uncertainty, Americans are more concerned with threats to their worldview, demonstrating how protective nationals are of what it means to be "American."

Additional findings of interest were elucidated by this study. Across all three models, participants with lower levels of education were more likely to have higher anti-immigrant sentiment. This is consistent with prior studies suggesting that lower levels of education are associated with more negative attitudes toward immigrants (Citrin et al., 1997; Espenshade & Calhoun, 1993; McDaniel et al., 2011). Labor market competition theory offers a plausible explanation for this association, positing that individuals with

lower levels of education have job skills similar to those of immigrants and, therefore, are in greater competition over resources (Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2007; Kunovich, 2013; Scheve & Slaughter, 2001). Likewise, in each model, participants with a more conservative political stance were more likely to have greater anti-immigrant sentiment than more liberal participants who equally perceived threats emanating from immigrants. This finding is consistent with previous research and supported by mainstream politics in which anti-immigrant propaganda and policies are often proposed by politically conservative lawmakers (Haubert & Fussell, 2006; Massey & Pren, 2012). Another significant finding from this study is that participants who identified as black/African American or Hispanic had less anti-immigrant sentiment than their white counterparts even when perceiving realistic threats. This may be attributed to a higher degree of empathy for immigrants as historically and currently discriminated populations themselves (Burns & Gimpel, 2000). Additionally, many native-born Hispanics have foreign-born relatives, as well as increased contact with immigrants, and are, therefore, more likely to have more empathy for immigrants (Fennelly & Federico, 2008). Curiously, the relationship between race/ethnicity and immigrant sentiment only approached significance in the model with both realistic and symbolic threats and was insignificant in the symbolic threat model. Finally, participants residing in a suburb, town/small city, or farm/countryside were more likely to harbor more anti-immigrant sentiment than those living in a big city, even when equally perceiving realistic threats. This is in line with prior research that has suggested a relationship between rural residence and the favoring of more restrictionist immigrant policy; however, previous findings diverge in that suburban residence was not a predictor of anti-immigrant

sentiment as it was in this study (Burns & Gimpel, 2000; Espenshade & Hempstead, 1996; Fennelly & Federico, 2008). A host of reasons are proposed to account for the higher anti-immigrant sentiment among rural residents, including an inflated perception of the share of immigrants that are undocumented and the coinciding of the increased immigrant presence in rural communities with the “walmartization” and expansion of agribusiness, among other shifts (Fennelly & Federico, 2008). As a result, it is possible that immigrants are scapegoats in rural communities, as they represent broader threats to the former way of life (Fennelly & Federico, 2008). Additionally, inter-group contact has been shown to reduce prejudice (Pettigrew, Wagner, Christ, & Stellmacher, 2007). Only 5% of immigrants live in non-metropolitan areas, compared to 20% of the native population, meaning there is less opportunity for inter-group contact in rural areas (Gozdziak & Martin, 2005). One hypothesis attempting to explain the inverse relationship between contact and prejudice is the increased “friendship potential,” prompting a reduction in anxiety for both groups and reducing stereotypes (Pettigrew, 1998).

LIMITATIONS

Characteristic of secondary data analysis, this study was inherently limited by the variables available in the *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration, 2010* dataset. While integrated threat theory (ITT) was the guiding framework for this study, the dataset only lent itself to the examination of two of the four threat domains as predictors of anti-immigrant sentiment. There was a dearth of items related to negative stereotypes and intergroup anxiety in the dataset. Additionally, only two survey items represented symbolic threats to worldview through somewhat of a proxy of immigrant integration.

Furthermore, these symbolic threat items had a less than ideal KMO of .500 and a Cronbach's alpha of .635, representing a limitation of the study. However, the justification for inclusion of this threat construct was that prior research has indicated those who perceive immigrant groups to be acculturating more slowly perceive more threat (van Osch & Breugelmans, 2011). Lastly, socioeconomic status was absent from the dataset and, therefore, could not be included as a control in this study.

The study was also limited by factors related to the study design of *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration, 2010*. Only 20% of interviews were conducted with cell phone users; the majority was collected via landline phone, meaning the former were underrepresented and the latter were overrepresented, which could ostensibly skew findings. Also, despite the study's adequate sample size, split ballots were used, which divided the volume of responses in half for some items. Representing an inconsistency in the population of interest, some survey items were asked in terms of all immigrants, while others were qualified with "illegal immigrants." Additionally, the study did not allow the impact of realistic threats to be assessed on anti-immigrant sentiment apart from symbolic threats and vice versa. As Stephan and colleagues (2005) suggested, there may be an important synergetic effect between the two threat domains, making isolation of the variables an important consideration. Finally, as a cross-sectional dataset, findings were reflective of a snapshot in time and did not offer an analysis of changes to threat perception and immigrant sentiment over time.

Despite these limitations, the present study is valuable as it was the first to consider realistic and symbolic threats as predictors of anti-immigrant sentiment among a nationally representative sample of Americans. Additionally, because data were

collected at the end of the Great Recession in the U.S., the study captures a historical context of economic uncertainty that is particularly relevant to prejudicial attitude formation. Moreover, the data were collected during a period of widespread anti-immigrant sentiment and, as a result, the study reflects the interaction between threat perception and prejudice in a period of heightened hostility toward immigrants.

IMPLICATIONS

Discrimination negatively impacts immigrants in a number of ways; it incites fear, anxiety, and depression and contributes to poorer mental and physical health (Araujo & Borrell, 2006; Becerra et al., 2012; Lassetter & Callister, 2009; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Williams & Mohammed, 2009). Hostile policies and practices, which are expressions of broad and pervasive discrimination, harm immigrant communities and warrant action that implicates policy, practice, and future research. With a mission of promoting social justice for oppressed and vulnerable populations (National Association of Social Workers, 2008), the field of social work has a professional responsibility to address the formation of anti-immigrant sentiment and discrimination experienced by immigrants.

Social Work Intervention

To prevent discrimination and its negative effects among immigrants, the formation of anti-immigrant sentiment must be inhibited, and negative social constructions of the population must be changed. Social work interventions should largely be focused around advocacy. At the policy level, it is imperative that social workers mobilize to engage in policy advocacy that protests and challenges legislation promoting and perpetuating discrimination toward immigrants. However, social workers

are not only needed to defensively fight against anti-immigrant and discriminatory legislation, but to propose and promote policies that protect immigrant populations. A number of mezzo-level social work interventions are also warranted that combat the threats perceived to emanate from immigrants that lead to negative sentiment and, ultimately, discrimination. Grassroots advocacy campaigns led by social workers that have the explicit aim of changing social constructions of immigrants and highlighting actual data that contradicts perceived threats are needed. These campaigns should educate communities on the positive impacts of immigrants on the U.S., such as the economic benefits they offer society (Becerra et al., 2012). Campaigns should also utilize strong messaging that appeals to American values, promoting a more accurate and favorable view of the population. Because this study illuminated that symbolic threats are more significant predictors of anti-immigrant sentiment, efforts should focus on minimizing perceived threats to culture and worldview. Stephan and Stephan (2001) propose that community education and training programs that discuss group differences in a non-evaluative way and stress the benefits of diversity may be an important effort to combat perceived symbolic threats. Similarly, social workers could utilize the intergroup dialogues method to bring natives and immigrants together, facilitating perspective sharing that fosters greater understanding and breaks down barriers between the two groups (Nagda & Maxwell, 2011). Finally, on both a mezzo and micro level, social workers should work with the population, empowering immigrants with knowledge of their legal rights when confronted with interpersonal or structural discrimination. As an example, *Know Your Rights* workshops, developed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), could be held to help clients protect themselves from discriminatory

treatment by law enforcement; direct practice social workers working with individual clients should also engage in case advocacy, distributing *Know Your Rights* booklets, for example, and discussing legal rights with clients (“Know Your Rights,” n.d.). Finally, social workers should engage in legal advocacy as a means of addressing discriminatory policies and practices. Social workers working on the frontlines with clients should document cases of discrimination and report them to organizations such as the ACLU.

Social Work Research

Future research is warranted that confirms and furthers the findings illuminated by the present study. This study used immigrant integration as a proxy for symbolic threat perception and found this measure to be predictive of anti-immigrant sentiment; as such, further studies are needed that explore the relationship between integration and negative attitudes toward immigrants. However, studies that measure the impact of other aspects of perceived symbolic threats on anti-immigrant sentiment, such as threats derived from intergroup differences in values, norms, and beliefs, are also warranted. Given Stephan et al.’s (2005) findings suggesting the possibility of a synergistic relationship between realistic and symbolic threats, a study design that assesses the predictive nature of each threat domain in isolation and in combination is merited; this would help determine the individual, as well as combinations, of threat domains that are most predictive of anti-immigrant sentiment. Additionally, studies that examine the predictors of negative sentiment toward specific immigrant subgroups, such as Latinos or Muslims, would be productive. Longitudinal studies would allow for the examination of changes in threat perception and anti-immigrant sentiment over time. Finally, future studies should be both nationally representative and illustrative of all four threat domains.

CONCLUSION

Grounded in ITT, this study contributes to a greater understanding of the predictors of anti-immigrant sentiment that lead to hostility and discrimination toward immigrants in the U.S. Using the *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration, 2010* dataset, the role of realistic and symbolic threats in the formation of negative attitudes toward immigrants was explored. Ordinal logistic regressions with immigrant sentiment, realistic threat, and symbolic threat scales revealed both threat categories are significant predictors of anti-immigrant sentiment, with symbolic threats being a more significant precursor. As predictors of prejudice, symbolic threats were roughly twice as significant as realistic threats, indicating that perceived threats to the American way of life are more threatening than threats to group wellbeing and welfare. This is a particularly interesting finding that is contrary to conventional wisdom given that data were collected in a time of economic disarray. These findings demonstrate that both realistic and symbolic threats underlie anti-immigrant sentiment and merit social work interventions. Social workers can minimize discrimination and mitigate its effects by advocating for more accurate and positive social constructions of immigrants, fostering greater understanding between natives and immigrants, and educating immigrant communities on their legal rights. Future social work research and practice may be prudent to give greater attention to symbolic threats, as findings from this study indicated that threats to worldview are stronger antecedents of discrimination toward immigrants in the U.S.

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